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Foster The Future

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Foster the Youth

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Abstract

Foster the Future

Thousands of foster children are moving on to becoming adults without the needed life skills education to be successful in life. Chamberlain's Children Center is a non-profit organization that provides services and housing for foster children. The administration department is the division in the organization that is implementing the life skills course for the teen girls. The project is an educational workshop series addressed to meet the need of daily living skills education for the future success of foster youth. The course consisted of weekly two-and-a-half-hour lessons prepared by community professionals and volunteers for a total of six weeks during the summer break. The life skills program reached six teen girls at the site. The project concentrated on the College, Getting a Job/Job Skills, and Money Skills lessons. The results were that the majority of the girls found the course to be useful and educational. The results for the main goal of the course will not be seen until the girls become adults and live independently. It is expected that the teen girls who participate in the life skills course will apply some or all of what they have learned throughout the course toward their future life so that they can be successful in college, careers, finances, health, and decision making. The life skills course was a success and it is recommended to be implemented in the future because of how it was received.

Keywords: foster children, life skills, success, daily living skills

I. Agency and Community Served

Chamberlain's Children Center (CCC) is a private nonprofit organization. As stated in Chamberlain's website, the agency was founded by Clara Chamberlain in 1965 when she started a home for special needs babies in the city of Santa Clara. Over the years she noticed that the need for foster care in behaviorally disabled children had increased. Mrs. Chamberlain also realized that the children were not succeeding in a foster care setting since they had experienced multiple placement failures in the past, prior to coming to her home. The residential care program needed to be complemented with a unique scholastic program that targets special education, so Mrs. Chamberlain established a school for the children in her care (Chamberlain's, 2012a)

Mrs. Chamberlain had a clear mission that she wanted to achieve in the lives of the children that came into her care. She wanted CCC to empower at-risk children in a home-like environment to heal from past trauma, discover their strengths, and develop the skills they need to achieve life-long success (Chamberlain's, 2012b). This is the mission of the agency.

CCC currently houses 23 children in their four cottages with ages ranging from six to 17 years old (D. Cauthen-Wright, personal communication, February 23, 2017). All ethnicities are served and they are currently as follows; 30% African American, 35% Latino, 27% White/Caucasian, 4% Pacific Islander, and 4% other (D. Cauthen-Wright, personal communication, February 23, 2017). CCC encounters more African American, Hispanic, and Caucasian children than any other race or ethnicity. The language within this population is English. The children come from all over California like the central valley, Bay Area, Monterey County, and Santa Barbara County, although there is currently one child that comes from Florida (D. Cauthen-Wright, personal communication, February 23, 2017).

Their housing is based out of the Residential Treatment program which is the four home-like cottages and is now considered a temporary housing, level 12 facility (D. Cauthen-Wright, personal communication, February 23, 2017). The goal is to work toward “family reunification, foster care, adoption, independent living program, emancipation or lower level group home” (Chamberlain’s, 2012e).

II. Problem, Issue, or Need

Foster youth are essentially left unprepared for their transition into adulthood. What this leads to is a future with poor educational, employment, economic, and housing outcomes. In California, 65,000 children and youth are in the foster care system (a much larger number than any other state) and each year 4,000 youth emancipate (Calvin, 2017). There are foster children that bounce around from placement to placement without any success. Unfortunately they end up in group homes where they fail to create a supportive attachment so when they age out of the foster care system they are left with no family, friends or resources to have a successful future. These children have been taken away from their families because of abuse and neglect and are not able to turn to their biological parents for guidance. As a result, these young adults lack the knowledge for college and financial aid application, money skills, job attainment skills, and other needed life skills.

Most of these former foster children are too concerned with surviving that college seems like a far off dream to them. According to the United States (2016), a lower percentage of former foster children enroll in and complete college compared to other youth. If these children did not have someone in their childhood or teen hood to guide and motivate them to aspire for a college education, they were not able to develop a strong educational foundation that would help take the edge off of filling out college applications and applying for financial aid. Based on what

Promises2Kids (2013) states, only 10% of foster children attend college and of those only 3% graduate. Without the guidance of someone, teens will find it difficult to go through the grand process of college. Since foster teens do not have the support in their schools because they are constantly relocating, foster teens will hardly ever hear about how the college process works.

It is no question that foster teens that age out of the system find it hard to get a job. They have no job skills, no college education, and half of them did not even complete high school. In 2012, only 48% of male former foster youth were employed (Foster Club, 2016). The same goes for former female foster youth, only about half will be employed by age 24 (Foster Club, 2016). If we compare it to their peers, 76% of them are employed at this age (Smith, 2011). Former foster children are experiencing a disparity in the ability to find employment compared to their peers. So if these individuals do not have a family that they can turn to when financial troubles hit and they don't have the needed skills and educational experience to get and maintain a job, then how are they supposed to find a means to eat and have a roof over their heads?

The lack of employment makes homelessness a huge issue for former foster youth. In Los Angeles County there are an estimated 12,000 to 15,000 homeless youth living on the streets and another 10,000 living in the Bay Area streets (Covenant House California, 2014). Too many foster children face poverty in early adulthood. It is not fair that because these adults were not guided and instructed when they were younger that they have to go through such hardships.

Former foster youth are already mentally and emotionally disturbed by childhood trauma so by adding the stress of not being prepared for successful adulthood will most likely lead these young adults to drugs and alcohol. According to the County of Santa Cruz's point in time count (2015), the main health conditions amongst unaccompanied homeless children and transition-age youth is drug or alcohol dependence and psychiatric or emotional conditions.

CAUSES	PROBLEM	CONSEQUENCES
1. abuse	California has the highest rate of foster children moving on to becoming adults without the life skills education needed to be successful.	1. homelessness
2. neglect		2. unemployment
3. abandonment		3.school drop out
4. constant relocation		4. low college attendance rates
5. foster care system		5. Drugs and alcohol
6. Lack of supportive attachment		

III. Capstone Project Description and Justification

The project was a Poverty Prevention Life Skills Course implemented to the teen girls at Chamberlain's (CCC). There were about five teen girls expected to attend the course ranging from ages 12-17. The overall end goal of this project was to improve the future financial and educational lives of the female foster teens at Chamberlain's. It is a goal that cannot be measured right now, but will prove to have been successful in the future when the teen girls become adults and make their own decisions-- choosing to go to college or not, searching for a job, having the right job skills, and managing their money wisely.

The goal of this project is to help the teen girls at CCC from falling prey to poverty which is the statistical fate of most foster teens. By giving the girls essential information like how to apply for college and financial aid, they are one step closer to improving their future by getting an education which will allow them to qualify for jobs where they will not be living paycheck to paycheck.

The teen girls will be better prepared than most foster teens to be able to find a job, fill out a job application, create a resume and a cover letter, know how to conduct themselves in a job interview, and essential on-the-job skills. Not only that, but the girls will get education on other fundamental necessities like one's credit score, bank products (eg. bank accounts, credit cards, loans), budgeting and other money skills, and stress management.

The life skills course given to the teen girls is a small stepping stone toward getting them to have a brighter financial and educational future. It is a source of knowledge and guidance that will prepare them to make the best decision for their lives. The expected project outcome is that the teen girls will have an improvement in the confidence and knowledge of college, getting/keeping a job, and money skills.

The entire summer life skills course was made up of 7 lessons focusing on getting a job, job skills, money skills, problem solving/making decisions, healthy relationships, healthy food choices/buying food on a budget, drugs and alcohol, college, and stress. For the purposes of this project, the College, Getting a Job/Job Skills, and Money Skills lessons were pertinent. The first step was to create an agenda for the lessons.

The *College* lesson showed the girls the reasons why they should choose to go to college, such as career advancement and better opportunities. It also gave the teens specific information as to which college would be beneficial for them; community college, four-year college, state college, and private college. The college application process was also reviewed with the teens such as the deadlines, grade point average, standardized assessment test, etc. Another aspect of this lesson was reviewing the financial aid available such as FAFSA, university grants, private grants, foster youth assistance, and work-study.

The *Getting a Job* lesson included the following agenda: looking for job opportunities, filling out job applications, completing a resume and cover letter, the importance of first impressions, getting work experience, preparing for an interview-dressing yourself, what questions to ask, researching the company, and how to respond. This lesson also included examples of job applications, resumes, and cover letters. The teen girls were able to discuss their dream jobs and any work experience they may have already completed.

The second part of this lesson was *Job Skill*. The teens were explained the importance of having a good attitude on the job and what it takes to be a great employee. The rest of this lesson had the following agenda: making a mistake on the job, handling criticism on the job, being prepared on the job, changing job- Why? How?

The following course was on *Money Skills*. The teens learned about a checking account and how to maintain one, savings accounts and how to save money, credit cards and the importance of one's credit score, using a debit card/credit card/ATM, paying interest, writing a check, and useful banking products such as online banking. The teens also learned about what is a budget and how to make one.

The next step was to create a calendar to insert the days for the lessons over the summer. It was important to host the course over the summer to ensure the availability of the teen girls to attend since they were on break from school. Apart from that, a specific day and time in which all of the teen girls were available was important find. It was decided to have the lessons on Wednesdays from 2pm-4pm in the CCC campus conference room. Not all lessons ran the full 2 hours, some of the lessons were only one hour so there were two different lessons in one day.

After the creation of the calendar, it was necessary to find community professionals that would volunteer to give the lessons. Since this was a second annual life skills course, there was

information and resources available from the last course. A list of possible presenters was made with the names of community agency workers. They were given a call and asked if they were available and willing to give the lessons associated with their line of work in the community. Once the presenters were confirmed, they were added to the calendar. They were sent out a reminder email about a week before their lesson.

Before the start of the first lesson, a questionnaire was given out to the teen girls in order to assess their confidence in job attainment and college application. The girls were also given a post questionnaire where they were asked to rate their readiness and knowledge in each topic after the completion of the course.

During each lesson, it was important to fulfill the needs that each presenter might have. A presenter could request to have a computer with internet, wifi, a projector, a display table, and/or a whiteboard. There was also snacks and drinks available at every lesson for the teen girls and the presenters. The teens also received a folder with paper so that they can bring to each lesson to take notes and save their documents from the lessons. Writing utensils were also provided at every lesson.

Apart from that, the staff was kept in communication so that if any challenge or obstacle was presented it would be made aware to all. It was important to remind staff of the weekly lessons so the girls weren't scheduled for any other activity on Wednesdays from 2-4pm.

A challenge that arose was the lack of staff communication. There was a week that the girls were not in town due to a camping trip and staff did not communicate that this activity would be happening during the course. Luckily, the lesson for that day was postponed for another day. One unexpected circumstance was the possibility of relocation for the teen girls. It was something that was always unexpected, but it did occur twice.

Activities	Deliverables	Timeline	Estimated completion dates
Recruit volunteer community members and create calendar schedule	Calendar, schedule, phone calls	April 17th- May 26th 2017	May 26th 2017
Pre data collection	questionnaire	June 21st 2017	June 21st 2017
Life Skills Course	snacks, note taking materials, community volunteers	June 21st 2017	August 30th 2017
Post data collection	questionnaire	August 23rd 2017	August 23rd 2017
Graduation	CCC campus, Matt Morrison, diplomas, snacks, staff, families	August 30th 2017	August 30th 2017
Analysis of Data	Excel spreadsheet, charts/graphs, questionnaire answers	August 23rd 2017	September 27th 2017

IV Project Results

The project was considered a success because there was an improvement in the overall preparedness and confidence in the teen girls. This was determined through the analysis of the pre- and post-course questionnaire that was completed by the girls. The pre questionnaire assessed the level in which each teen girl felt confident in her knowledge and confidence in getting a job, going to college, and life as an adult in general. In order to assess the effectiveness of the life skills course, the data collected from the questionnaires showed that there was a positive correlation with the improvement in the teen girls' knowledge and confidence by the end of the course. Apart from the assessment through the questionnaires, the teen girls also gave an informal verbal feedback during the life skills course graduation dinner that proved how effective and helpful the course was to them.

The pre-course questionnaire consisted of four questions and it can be viewed in Appendix A. It was handed out to each girl at the beginning of the course. Since the agency

received a teen girl near the end of the course her pre and post questionnaire only included the course topics that she was present for.

The post-course questionnaire was given at the end of the course. It can be viewed in Appendix B. This questionnaire consisted of six questions which was longer in length than the pre-course questionnaire. The questions aimed at measuring the level of helpfulness that the job, college, and money skills lessons were to the teen girls.

There was a total of five pre-course questionnaires completed. Of the five, only one was partially complete because one teen girl was placed into the agency halfway through the course and she did not answer question number two relating to the college lesson since she did not attend it. There was a total of four post-course questionnaires completed since one of the teen girls was abruptly placed outside of the agency and there was no way to collect data from her.

According to the results, at the beginning of the course only 50% of the teen girls wanted to go to college, which was a higher number than expected.

Question:	Number of responses
Wants to attend college	2
Does not want to attend college	2
Total	4

By the end of the course, 100% of the girls that attended the college lesson and that completed the post-questionnaire answered that they wanted to go to college.

Question:	Number of responses
Wants to attend college	3
Does not want to attend college	0
Total	3

Out of the girls that answered whether if they want to go to college, the average number indicating the level of confidence to apply for college (1-5, one being the least confident and five being the most confident) was 2. This indicated that the two girls that wanted to go to college

were not very confident in the college application process. By the end of the course, the average number for the confidence in applying for college was 3. Although not a very high number, it was still an increase from the pre-questionnaire.

The girls were also questioned on their level of confidence to get a job with the rating from one to five (one being the least confident and five being the most confident). The answers for the pre-questionnaire had an average of 2.6 and by the post-questionnaire the average answer increased to 3.7. This proves that the How to Get a Job/Job Skills lesson proved to be beneficial to the confidence in the girls for getting a job. The girls felt more prepared to be able to eventually apply for a job.

There were three girls that answered the question regarding how helpful the college lesson was and two out of three of them answered that it was helpful and the third girl answered that it was very helpful. As for the helpfulness of the job lesson, two-thirds of the girls answered that it was very helpful and one-third answered that it was helpful. There was also a total of three girls that answered this question. The last of the helpfulness questions was the money skills course which 100% of the four girls answered that it was very helpful. This data shows that the girls viewed these lessons to be good sources of information.

College Lesson			Job Lesson			Money Skills Lesson	
Very helpful	1		Very helpful	2		Very helpful	4
Helpful	2		Helpful	1		Helpful	0
Unhelpful	0		Unhelpful	0		Unhelpful	0
Very Unhelpful	0		Very Unhelpful	0		Very Unhelpful	0
Total	3		Total	3		Total	4

The last question in the post-questionnaire looks to find the level of likelihood of each girl applying what they have learned in the course. The different answers were very likely, likely,

unlikely, and very unlikely. The data shows that 100% of the girls answered that they were very likely to apply the knowledge that they learned in the course.

The project had many strengths. The scheduling of the lessons was done with the teen girl's weekly activities put into consideration. Most of the girls had weekly visits, counseling, and other activities going on which made it difficult but not impossible to find a set day and time that the girls would most likely be able to attend the lessons. Another strength was the outings that were planned. The first outing was to Safeway where the girls had to practice budgeting and prioritizing their money.

The bank tour is another example of success. The teen girls were taken to a local bank and given a tour. They were shown the different types of services they can receive at the bank. They were also shown how to use the ATM's and how to fill out a deposit slip. The girls really liked the hands-on activities. It engaged them and challenged them on another level that lecturing cannot.

A challenge that arose was the lack of staff communication. There was a week that the girls were not in town due to a camping trip and staff did not communicate that this activity would be happening during the course. Luckily, the lesson for that day was postponed for another day. The communication with staff was also improved by sending out more frequent reminders to the house supervisors.

V. Personal Reflection/ Final Thoughts

The project has proven to be successful. It is a project that should continue to be carried out in the future. It is a source of valuable information for the teen foster girls at Chamberlain's. The number of teen girls at this agency is very minimal compared to the amount of foster teens in other counties, but the lasting impacts of this course make it completely crucial.

Since the teen girl population at CCC is very small, I do recommend the agency to expand this program to other foster youth agencies or homes near by. It can serve to build relationships within the community. I also recommend that the agency include teen boys into the program since it will be just as useful for them as well.

The College/University lesson was very valuable. It was full of information which the girls found to be helpful. It would be beneficial to expand the allotted time (from one hour to possibly two hours) for this lesson and to also include more hands-on activities to keep the girls engaged. The snacks were better served at the end of the lesson so that if there were any wrappers on them, they wouldn't be disruptive during the lesson.

As for the Getting a Job/Job Skills lesson, it would be a good idea to also include more hands on activities. The girls could benefit from role-playing a job interview or writing a mock resume for their dream job. This will get them even more confident and excited for doing it in the future.

It was interesting to see how foster youth are easily and abruptly moved from one agency to another. The lack of consistency allows for their education in life skills course to go unnoticed. Since they rely on the government systems to raise them there is no specific person that is in charge of making sure that this population is secure for their future, like a parent would do for their child.

Chamberlain's is an agency that wants to see foster youth succeed in life by giving the children the necessary services that they might need. This life skills course was able to address the needs of foster youth in this agency by giving them the necessary knowledge to succeed in life. It provided the stepping stones in which the teens will use to navigate their future decisions once it becomes time to do so.

The broader issue is that these foster youth do not have parents that can raise them and guide them. Foster children are removed from their parents because of abuse and neglect. This project addresses this problem in a small way because it will hopefully help the foster youth not fall into the same cycle as their parents. Instead of being drug-addicts and school dropouts, these foster teens are being guided to a successful future where they will be educated.

There is a systematic change that needs to occur to ensure that all foster youth receive the necessary life skills education for their future success. There should be laws ensuring the security and consistency of the educational needs for this youth. The government should create ways to secure a foster child's long-term place at an agency or home to avoid constant relocation.

Communication is key with this project. It takes a great deal of collaboration within the agency and within the community. For fellow future capstone students planning on working on this type of project, I deeply recommend to keep in constant communication especially within the agency. Things happen and if one is not aware it can negatively affect the implementation and planning of the project. It is important to constantly communicate with the supervisors in charge of the foster youth since that staff is closest to them. Mentors are a great source of information and if challenges or obstacles rise up, they can help guide you through it.

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Appendix A

1. Do you know what you want to do in life after you turn 18 years old?
yes/no
2. Do you want to go to college?
yes/no
 - a. If so how confident are you in applying for college?
Least confident 1-2-3-4-5 Most confident
3. Do you feel prepared for your life as an adult?
yes/no
4. How confident are you in getting a job?
Least confident 1-2-3-4-5 Most confident

Appendix B

1. Do you want to go to college?

yes/no

- a. If so how confident are you in applying for college?
Least confident 1-2-3-4-5 Most confident
2. How helpful was the college course?
Very helpful/helpful/unhelpful/very unhelpful
3. How helpful was the job course?
Very helpful/helpful/unhelpful/very unhelpful
4. How confident are you that you can get a job?
Least confident 1-2-3-4-5 Most confident
5. How helpful was the money skills course/bank tour?
Very helpful/helpful/unhelpful/very unhelpful
6. How likely are you to apply the knowledge that you learned in this course?
Very likely-Likely-Unlikely-Very unlikely